

Opening Statement of the Honorable Fred Upton
Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade
Hearing on “Oversight of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration”
April 14, 2016

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Auto safety – it’s a matter of life and death. There are not many issues as important as keeping Americans safe on the road. Oversight of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is an essential part of this subcommittee’s work in protecting drivers across Michigan and the United States. With over 250 million vehicles on the road transporting American families everyday, today’s oversight hearing offers an important opportunity to evaluate NHTSA’s efforts in fulfilling its core mission of reducing traffic fatalities and making sure our nation’s roadways and vehicles are safe.

In the past few years we’ve seen NHTSA face many challenges. The agency has struggled to collect and take action on meaningful vehicle safety data, and major recalls have come too late and often with an unclear message on how to fix the problem. We are sadly all too familiar with the tragic consequences of safety failures.

The Fixing America’s Surface Transportation Act, signed into law last year, included numerous reforms sponsored by members of this subcommittee to address some of those challenges and improve accountability, transparency, and efficiency at the agency. I thank Chairman Burgess for his leadership in that effort, and I look forward to discussing the implementation progress of those reforms with Administrator Rosekind today.

I should note that while the FAST Act represents a positive step forward in improving auto safety practices within NHTSA and across the auto industry at large, there is still much more that can, and should, be done. With low recall completion rates, the ongoing Takata recalls, and cyber security issues, other reforms and initiatives must be considered to prevent further tragedies.

One problem we have seen repeatedly is an agency struggling to keep pace with next-generation automotive technologies. Being from the auto state, I understand how innovation and technological advancements developed by the auto industry are introducing greater complexities into today’s vehicles. However, it’s NHTSA’s responsibility and obligation to stay on top of those developments and protect the driving public.

Part of the problem is a lack of good testing and research facilities for connected and autonomous vehicles. Facilities like Michigan’s American Center for Mobility at Willow Run are critical to policymakers’ preparation and understanding of these advanced technologies, and faster consumer adoption. Until we have an accident- and- defect-free vehicle and roadway system, we can never put too much emphasis on safety. And you can’t have safety without testing. I want to explore how we can move forward with critical testing facilities like Willow Run which will both secure America’s continued leadership in advanced automotive technologies but also protect American families on the road.

The automotive industry is vital to Michigan’s economy, as well as the nation’s. It drives innovation, job creation, productivity, and economic advancement. Robust auto safety is fundamental to that progress. We must all continue working together to enhance vehicle and roadway safety for our nation’s motorists.

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